**DON’T RETURN TO SLAVERY**

***8Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.***

**Galatians 4:8-11 (NIV)**

In 4:1-7 Paul brought to conclusion the argument that began back in 3:1. In our paragraph here, he applies this argument to the Galatians’ situation in a very direct way. None of the special language from the preceding argument is found here (faith, works, righteousness, Christ, Spirit, Torah, Abraham, sonship) although Torah is implied in vs.9 and10. The application is all about the Galatians themselves. Paul can hardly believe what is happening. The new matter here is the observance of Torah, not circumcision, which mustn’t have happened yet, but the observance of the Jewish calendar, which obviously had begun.

‘*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods’* (4:8). Applying the preceding argument to the Galatians’ situation, Paul contrasts their former way of life with what has come to them in Christ. The contrast takes a very Jewish turn, while at the same time returning to the theme of bondage to the powers which he used of himself and fellow Jews in 4:3. The issue is put in terms of ‘knowing God’ which had been beyond these former pagans. They not only did not know God but were themselves ‘enslaved’ to ‘*those who by nature are not gods.’* This is a typical Jewish condemnation of idolatry in any and every form. Paul’s actual wording does not suggest that these slave masters were ‘beings.’ In 4:9 he will describe them as ‘*weak and miserable principles.’* The important connection here is with the language of ‘enslavement’ (c.f. 4:7 ‘*you are no longer a slave’*). Paul is about to tie their readiness to submit to the ‘bondage’ of Torah-observance with their former bondage to the ‘powers’ (4:3).

‘*But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?’* (4:9). The ‘*but’* means ‘on the other hand.’ Paul’s contrast is between v.8 where the Galatians did not know the one true God (and were enslaved to false gods) and now do ‘*know God*.’ Why the immediate addition ‘*or rather are known by God’*? In a letter in which everything is predicated on grace, Paul will not allow even the truth that these former pagans have come to know God through Christ and the Spirit to become for them a form of ‘works.’

Where one might have expected 4:9 to end on a note that balances 4:8 (‘now that you know God you have been set free from your former slavery to those who by nature are not gods’), Paul instead resorts to a rhetorical question: ‘*how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?’* This goes back to 4:3 where he identified his and others’ prior life as a Jew living under the Law with these same ‘*basic principles of the world.*’ Paul might be writing to former pagans but he wants them to recognise the similarity between the bondages. His whole point is that for them to revert to ‘Law-keeping’ is to put themselves under a bondage equal to that of their former way of life as pagans.

‘*Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?’* (4:9b). At issue is enslavement. They formerly knew one kind and are now willingly submitting to another. Paul is stirred up. He will go on to say ‘*neither circumcision nor* *uncircumcision has any value’* and in Philippians 3:2,3 calls Judaisers who insist on Gentile circumcision ‘*dogs’* and ‘*mutilators of the flesh*.’

‘*You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!’* (4:10). While the wording is not specific, there can be little question that this is Paul’s own language for the weekly, monthly and annual feasts that Jews lived their lives around. Paul’s actual sentence begins with the word ‘*days*,’ implying the first area the Galatian church had capitulated over was keeping the regulations of the Jewish Sabbath.

‘*I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you’* (4:11). Paul brings the whole issue back to them and him, and his former ministry among them. ‘*I fear for you’* expresses a degree of anxiety on a personal level. The fact that they had already brought in Sabbath observance gave Paul good reason for concern, particularly that they would embrace circumcision.

From Paul’s own side at issue is ‘*that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.’*Picking up language he has already used regarding the Corinthians own faith (1 Corinthians 15:1,2) and especially at the beginning of the present argument in 3:4, he is hoping that this is not true regarding the Galatians. This echoes language from Isaiah’s Servant of the Lord (49:4) which is then transferred to Yahweh’s ‘chosen ones’ in 65:23. Paul’s wording is intentionally very similar. If they embrace circumcision ‘*I have wasted my efforts on you.’* They will have been ‘*alienated from Christ’* (5:4). One cannot add to grace and it remain grace. Once that is done, one thereby chooses to be related to God on the basis of obedience to some form of law – and that eliminates grace altogether.

Paul’s application in this passage is an appeal for them not to return to slavery (4:9). With this in mind he will now make a strong, personal appeal that they return to their earthly brother (4:9) and parent (4:20).

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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